

“While the goal of earning EU membership has been central to the recent push to implement significant political and legal reforms in Turkey, it still remains to be seen whether Turkey’s Muslim heritage, large population, and economic underdevelopment will remain immovable obstacles to full membership. It is now clear that this is a decision that can no longer be indefinitely postponed by Brussels or Ankara.”

Bringing Turkey into Europe

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In December the European Union’s leadership met in Copenhagen and announced that eight formerly East bloc countries, the Greek-controlled portion of Cyprus, and Malta were candidates for membership. The fanfare surrounding the long-awaited event was drowned out, however, by the EU’s decision to delay, once again, Turkey’s application for membership.

The EU’s continued postponement of Turkey’s candidacy highlights fundamental tensions over European identity and inclusiveness. “Europe,” as a political and economic entity, emerged from the ruins of World War II through the determination and efforts of leaders like France’s Charles de Gaulle, Jean Monnet, and Robert Schuman and Germany’s Konrad Adenauer to create a structure that would prevent a return of Franco-German rivalry for dominance on the European continent. Monnet, an economist and the primary architect of what would become the EU, believed that substantial political as well as cultural integration had to be undertaken on the continent if the next generation was to escape the demons of nationalist chauvinism as well as subordination to the two superpowers. His vision of Europe relied heavily on a common historic sense of Western Christian identity and Germano-Latin language and culture, symbolized by the great reverence postwar Franco-German leaders showed for Charlemagne (Karl Magnus) and his ninth-century Carolingian Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, the emergence of present-day European nations and cultures can be traced

to this Germano-Latin cultural framework imposed through the Carolingian conquests of pagan Saxons, Wends, and Celts.

Significantly, this early proto-Western European identity also emerged simultaneously in opposition to Muslim forces in Iberia, southern France, and Italy. Although the significant presence of Muslims and Jews on the European continent was coterminous with the emergence of Western Christendom, both were viewed as alien elements in the European body politic—often expelled where practical, and all too often exterminated when not. This pattern began during the Crusades and Reconquista, hauntingly continued through the nineteenth century with the saliency of the Jewish and “Eastern” or Muslim questions in Europe, and tragically manifested itself with the Holocaust of European Jewry a half century ago and the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Balkan Muslims in the 1990s. Yet expulsion and extermination have also been accompanied by efforts at accommodation and integration.

No country better embodies these contradictions and antinomies than Turkey, which straddles the geographic divide between Europe and Asia, and the cultural divide between the Western and Islamic worlds. The project of a modern Europe hinges on successfully resolving the challenge posed by Turkey’s candidacy for EU membership, which will also affect the successful integration of large postwar Muslim immigrant communities in Western Europe.

ESTABLISHING EUROPE’S EASTERN BORDERS

The EU’s refusal to set an early date for definitive accession negotiations for Turkey led to bitter recriminations. The Turks, who have defended Europe as NATO allies since 1952 and had applied

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for associate membership in the EU's precursor, the European Economic Community, as early as 1959, voiced outrage at the spectacle of former Warsaw Pact countries joining the EU while they were left at the door without even a definitive date for discussing the possibility of membership. Turkey had signed an agreement in July 1970 that foresaw eventual Turkish accession. Following a long period of social upheaval and military rule in the early 1980s, Turkey formally applied for full membership on April 14, 1987. The European Commission—the EU's executive body—endorsed Turkey's eligibility for membership in December 1989 but deferred assessment of the application. Turkey's successful negotiations for a customs union in 1995 appeared to stall progress toward full membership in the EU. The EU refusal to grant Turkey candidate status at the Luxembourg summit in December 1997 (for ostensibly failing to meet democratic standards) led to a period of frozen relations with Ankara. Comments by some conservative European leaders that portrayed Turkey's religious and cultural heritage as allegedly "non-European" underscored for many the insurmountable barriers to membership even if much needed political and judicial reforms had been undertaken.

At its summit in Helsinki that followed in December 1999, the EU agreed to formally recognize Turkey's application, contingent on substantial progress toward the far-reaching political, legal, and economic reforms set out earlier. Although serious efforts at such reform were finally made by Ankara in the summer of 2002, the Copenhagen summit in December once again highlighted fundamental issues of identity and history that continue to stand in the way of full Turkish membership.

For the historic "core" countries of the EU, Turkey has posed a vexing conundrum. Turkey's strategic location, potentially lucrative market, and millions of émigrés already in the EU have made it a country difficult to spurn. However, its large Muslim population, developing economy, and historic image as chief rival to Latin Christendom have for many European leaders rendered it impossible to fully accept. For decades, European ministers had been able to avoid making a final decision on Turkey, confident that the country's authoritarian military-bureaucratic establishment would fail to meet even minimal EU standards of democracy, civilian rule, pluralism, and tolerance.

Turkish pressure for a definitive decision on full membership brought to the fore the religious, ethnic, and cultural bases for opposition to Turkish

entry by many leading European conservatives. Just before the summit, EU Commissioner Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, a former French president, openly uttered the oft-muffled sentiments that Turkey had a "different culture, a different approach, a different way of life." Turkish membership, he maintained, "would be the end of the European Union." Although his remarks were criticized, they were nonetheless endorsed by the leader of the German Christian Democratic right, Edmund Stoiber, in what seemed to be a calculated maneuver. Stoiber reiterated a vision of European identity that drew on shared cultural and religious traditions that were historically separate from if not in opposition to the East. "Europe," Stoiber said, "is a community that is based on Western values. As a community of shared values, Europe has to deal with the question of its borders. These borders must be based on shared values, culture, and history. Turkey's membership would breach these borders."

Matters were not helped by Washington's heavy-handed intervention on Turkey's behalf. This effort, which was led in Europe by the hawkish United States assistant secretary of defense, Paul Wolfowitz, was so transparently tied to the use of Turkish bases for a possible invasion of Iraq that it backfired; many accused the United States of trying to use Turkey as a Trojan horse to derail tighter European integration. Emotions over the fundamental issue of European identity and its perceived basis in ethnicity and religion were so raw by the end of the Copenhagen summit that French President Jacques Chirac lashed out at escalating Turkish indignation by chauvinistically remarking, "It is not only European law you must follow, you also have to be polite and civilized." Turkish Prime Minister Abdullah Gul furiously responded, accusing EU leaders of "blackmail" and "prejudice."

The Copenhagen summit ended by setting 2004 as the date on which the EU would discuss a timetable for possible Turkish accession talks, which are contingent on reforms in the Turkish political and legal system. Ankara resigned itself to the new timetable, greatly disappointed at having been put off yet again. For both the leaders of a newly emerging Europe as well as Turkey, the summit represented a watershed in determining the future identity and orientation of both parties.

"TURKEY IN EUROPE" . . .

Europe's reluctance to accept the Turks is deeply rooted in the historical construction of "self" and "other" that still frames contemporary European

identity. For five centuries the Ottoman Empire was one of Europe's major powers, its center of gravity located in the quarter of the European continent it controlled at its zenith in the sixteenth century. The Ottomans, like the Moors in Iberia, left an indelible imprint on the cultures, languages, music, architecture, and cuisines of southeastern Europe. This long European presence would seem to have entitled the Ottomans to recognition as a member of the European society of states. Yet, the term "European" had an overriding cultural and religious connotation rather than merely a geographic or even racial meaning. Thus, the term generally used to describe Ottoman territories in the Balkans, "Turkey in Europe," pointed to what was perceived by Christian European states as an anomaly in their midst—even though the centuries-old Ottoman Muslim presence was woven into the fabric of southeastern Europe and the Black Sea region.

Striking parallels exist between Turkey's present contentious position in Europe's political and security architecture and its historic role in Europe's balance-of-power politics. At once intimate and familiar, foreign and exotic, the Sublime Porte—as the Ottoman Empire was known—and various European chancelleries carried out extensive trade and military cooperation against mutual antagonists without ever fully coming to terms with one another. The Ottomans achieved formal diplomatic entrée into the Concert of Europe with the Treaty of Paris in 1856. This achievement, however, failed to resolve the "Eastern Question" which centered on Ottoman rule over large numbers of Christian subjects in southeastern Europe, Asia Minor, and the Levant. European nations insisted that the Ottomans continue the far-reaching reforms that began with the Tanzimat movement in 1839, which were designed to bring the empire's legal code and administrative practices in line with prevailing European norms. For their part, Ottoman Turkish leaders accused European powers of "double standards" and "bad faith" in seeking advantages for Christian subjects that were not reciprocated in the case of Muslim populations suffering under harsh Western imperial domination.

... AND EUROPE IN TURKEY

The question of Europe has also been central to Turkish domestic political discourse and issues of

national identity. The 1923 Republican revolution under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk came with the goal of making Turkey a part of Western European civilization. Kemal and his followers in the Republican People's Party believed the primary step in achieving this goal was to dispel Islamic culture and religion in Turkey from the dominant role it had enjoyed since the earliest Seljuk and Ottoman times. The Kemalist elite undertook a Jacobin assault on almost all vestiges of Ottoman Islamic civilization, from dress and decorum to art and language. Tellingly, this elite refused to adopt the real basis of Western dynamism: democracy, pluralism, and a secularism granting all citizens the right to believe or disbelieve as they chose. This superficial campaign of Westernization, which enshrined a deeply authoritarian military-bureaucratic establishment, created the

main impediment to Turkey's successful evolution into a fully developed democracy.

Ironically, the Kemalist elite—rooted in a military caste of praetorian officers—justified its monopoly on power as necessary to complete the march westward. It also sought entry into the European Union. While the goal of becoming a "European" nation was always the central ideological pillar of this elite, it was quite unwilling to implement the requisite political and juridical reforms which would undermine its monopoly on power. The Turkish political establishment instead used the dubious strategy of achieving EU membership by citing the alleged threat posed by "fundamentalism" should Ankara continue to be spurned. Thus, in the run-up to negotiations over the customs union and tighter integration with the EU in 1995, Prime Minister Tansu Çiller of the center-right True Path Party told Western audiences that "Now the European parliament has to make its decision. It can say either yes or no—there is no third alternative. . . . The radicals, the fundamentalists, and the extreme rightists will capitalize on any delay in the decision as a no vote and as an objection to Turkey by Europe. . . . So it is going to strengthen the radicals and may even move them into power—move the anti-Europe, antidemocratization, anti-Westernization, antisecular forces into power. . . . Now it's me versus them."

Given this background, it is clear why Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party, which had long sought to

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mobilize traditional Anatolian Turkish Muslim society, viewed attempts at European integration with suspicion if not outright hostility. Many members and supporters of Welfare were resentful of the way the Westernization project had been used by the Republican establishment in Ankara and Istanbul to justify the exclusion of the majority of the population from the corridors of power. They also doubted that Europe could ever overcome its prejudices against Muslims in general and Turks in particular in granting the country full EU membership. At this period in the mid-1990s, just as Turkey's Muslim-oriented political movement was emerging as the most dynamic and popular force in the country, Welfare's leaders advocated instead that Turkey assume a leading role in achieving political and economic integration with the Muslim states of the Middle East and Central Asia.

When the Welfare Party won a dramatic parliamentary election in 1995, the Kemalist military-bureaucratic establishment reacted. On February 28, 1997 the Turkish military launched a "soft coup," forcing Prime Minister Erbakan's Welfare government to resign and the Welfare Party to dissolve. One of the main charges levied against the deposed government was that it had tried to divert Turkey from its European trajectory by advocating the formation of a "Muslim NATO and common market."

In the six years since the coup, groups representing the excluded majority of Turkish society have come to view EU membership as the most effective tool by which to achieve democratic reforms in the country. This about-face has been startling. In late 2002 the Justice and Development Party—which succeeded the banned Welfare Party—achieved a decisive electoral victory in the Turkish parliament. Unlike Welfare, the Justice and Development Party, led by Prime Minister Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has realized that its vision of a more democratic, tolerant, and civilian-ruled country not only corresponded to conditions established by the EU but were likely to be attained only by the carrot of full membership offered by Brussels.

The hostility of the traditional Kemalist elite to essential reforms that would bring the country closer to prevailing European norms and regulations has now been exposed. This has left the military-bureaucratic establishment in a bind. The required reforms for EU membership will effectively strip its members of authoritarian power. But rejecting integration with Europe would also mean rejecting the very bedrock of their ideological legit-

imacy. It would also leave the traditional establishment with few alternatives to meet the rising demands of a new generation of Turkish citizens. Those concerns led the Turkish parliament in August 2002 to pass constitutional amendments abolishing capital punishment, lifting many restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language, and allowing greater freedom of speech to criticize the military and official policy. In the words of one longtime human-rights campaigner cited in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, these were the "most positive changes made during the whole history of the Turkish Republic." While the reforms have been genuine and are now the law of the land, it remains to be seen how they will be enforced in transforming a deeply authoritarian political system. The use of torture is still widespread and elected officials continue to face reprimands from military officers, who have yet to shed their self-appointed guardianship role. Until these shortcomings are seen to have been fully remedied, Turkey will fall short of achieving full membership.

BRIDGING THE GAPS

While the goal of earning EU membership has been central to the recent push to implement significant political and legal reforms in Turkey, it still remains to be seen whether Turkey's Muslim heritage, large population, and economic underdevelopment prove to be immovable obstacles to full membership. It is now clear that this is a decision that can no longer be indefinitely postponed by Brussels or Ankara.

Some have speculated that Turkey will ultimately be offered a special status falling short of the full rights of membership, most significantly including the right of free movement and residency for Turkish citizens in EU countries. In the November 27, 2002 *Guardian*, one EU diplomat said that Turkey will be a "super best friend, with some aspects of social and economic integration . . . a best friend, ally, and trusted partner, but not sitting at the top table." Others have warned that anything short of fully anchoring Turkey in the EU would likely lead it to drift into an Islamic orbit fostering the conditions for a "clash of civilizations." But dire predictions concerning European relations with its Islamic neighbors remain greatly exaggerated. Much of the Islamic world increasingly views a united Europe as a vital counterweight to growing United States belligerence. This view is also shared by French and German leaders, who have responded to American pressures and unilateralism concerning Iraq by

pressing for much greater cohesion in European foreign and security policy.¹

Indeed, Turkey's political and military leaders as well as the vast majority of the public have reacted negatively to United States pressure on Turkey to allow the use of bases to invade Iraq from the north and set up a potentially long-term occupation in the region. Many Turks remain bitter about the widespread devastation to the region caused by Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and the heavy economic and political costs it unleashed for Turkey's southeast. The 1990s also witnessed genocidal onslaughts against formerly Ottoman Muslim populations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Chechnya. These events traumatized many people in Turkey and underscored the tragedies that have beset the area since the Ottoman state stopped playing a hegemonic role.²

While Ankara's dependence on American economic assistance may well force it to acquiesce to Washington's invasion of Iraq, there is no guarantee that this war will prove any more beneficial to Turkey and the region than the last one. Given the deep ideological and structural constraints, many informed observers doubt that Washington is inclined or able to address the deeply rooted systemic issues fueling

both conflict in the region and escalating anti-American sentiment throughout the Muslim world. The perception that foreign policy-making in the Bush administration is increasingly dominated by hard-liners with a pronounced animus toward the Islamic world has given pause to many.

Europe does not share this ideological baggage and its geographic proximity to the Middle East and reliance on Muslim immigrants make it much more likely to play a sustained beneficial role in the region. Unless Washington proves capable of achieving a just and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict as demanded by the EU and the Arab League, European and Turkish interests may find themselves in congruence. European leaders increasingly appreciate that their national security requires a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict coupled with sweeping economic and political progress on the continent's southern and eastern rim.

Given these emerging realities, Turkey's role as a bridge between Europe and Asia may take on a special urgency. Turkey's new Muslim democratic leadership is ideologically committed to playing such a beneficial leadership role in the Islamic world and sees no contradiction in Turkey's historic linking of Europe to the west and the Islamic world to the south and east. The EU's promotion of democratic reforms, economic investment, and the opening of markets to its immediate Muslim neighbors in North Africa and the Middle East are also vital steps in addressing issues of immigration, security, and regional stability. Such enlightened self-interest led the United States to promote closer integration and development with Mexico through the North American Free Trade Agreement. The coming years may well see Europe and Turkey attempting similar results in the broader area of Euro-Asia regardless of Turkey's final status in the European Union. ■

¹Britain, and to a lesser degree Spain and Italy, have been leery of Franco-German designs for a more integrated and politically cohesive continent and thus have been enthusiastic proponents of Turkish accession. This fact, and Washington's recent intensive lobbying, has only intensified Franco-German suspicions that Turkey's membership may be promoted as a mechanism to forestall the sort of tight political integration envisioned by Jean Monnet and others who desired a united Europe capable of asserting itself against superpowers like the United States.

²For an analysis of the impact of these tragedies on contemporary Turkish politics and society, see Mujeeb R. Khan, "Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Crisis of the Post-Cold War International System," *East European Politics and Societies*, Fall 1995.